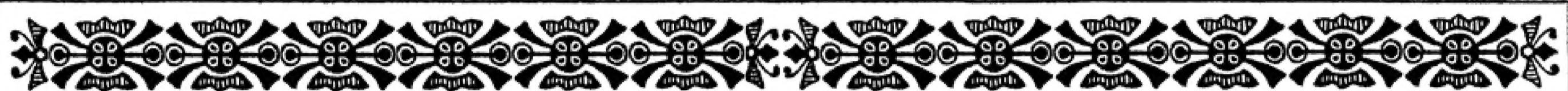


ANATHEMA



Volume IV

August & September 2018 - Free

Issue VIII

WE ALL LIVE DOWNSTREAM

THE FIGHT AGAINST BORDERS CONTINUES

So much of civilized life is over looked and taken for granted, further divorcing us from the rest of the natural world, and from any understanding of its health, limits, or importance. What is the source of our tap water, for instance? It comes from the rivers immediately surrounding the city, as a recent info-graphic published by the city on bus stops strives to illustrate. Even if you are drinking water from elsewhere, there are costs of pollution from packaging and fuel-burning transportation, besides the nearly inevitable pollution of that waterway, and the impact our local polluted waterways contribute to so many aspects of ours and others' lives. That is to say, since most of us bathe in, cook with, and drink this water, it might be worth looking at its composition.

[“We All Live...” cont. pg. 3]

Whether or not an Occupy ICE camp exists at Broad and Arch, it may seem like this summer's movement against borders and ICE is finished; it may be, but the struggles for free movement and against confinement will exist as long as cages and walls continue to divide. There need not be a camp or a “movement” for the struggles to continue.

Regardless of leftist (and anarchist) enthusiasm, people will keep crossing borders, living here without papers or status, and going where they want. Movement will continue. Those living illegally in the United States will continue to form and contribute to networks of support, complicity, and subversion that keep them alive and safer in this policed and

[“The Fight Against Borders...” cont. pg. 4]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WE ALL LIVE DOWNSTREAM	- 1
THE FIGHT AGAINST BORDERS	
CONTINUES	- 1
THE MIRAGE OF ECONOMIC	
PROSPERITY	- 1
WHAT WENT DOWN	- 2
ACCIDENT OR ATTACK?	- 4
COMPANIES PROFITING FROM PUTTING	
PEOPLE IN CAGES	- 5
KNOCK DOWN, DRAG OUT FASCISTS IN	
THE STREET	- 5
THE FALSE IDOL OF SELF SACRIFICE	- 7
7 THESES ON SELFIES	- 7
A TEST OF STRENGTH	- 8

THE MIRAGE OF ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

Despite constant governmental controversies and the raging disaster that is the global capitalist system, in late August President Trump was able to announce record-setting economic success as the U.S.'s bull market became the longest running in its history. For those struggling to find work and stay afloat, it may be surprising to hear that the economy is doing better than ever and unemployment at an all-time low. How is that possible?

To start with, the stock market is not an accurate indication of how well the economy is actually doing. Even to many capitalist experts, the current valuations of the market seem like a serious stretch. But more importantly, to correctly assess current economic phenomena would require a historical perspective on capitalism and certain

[“The Mirage...” cont. pg. 6]

WHAT WENT DOWN

July through September: Prison strike graffiti across the city.

July: Posters against ICE and prison strike posters go up around the city.

July 19: ATM torn from its base and carried away using a rental truck.

July 19 & 20: March and noisy protest outside of ICE office in Center City.

July 20: Republic Bank at 1601 Market robbed using a demand note.

July 22: The Rainy Day Glues sabotaged three Wells Fargo bank's ATMs in solidarity with anarchists in Indonesia and those fighting borders. "We chose this bank franchise because it profits from migrant imprisonment, but we know they all have it coming."

July 22: Spontaneous march from OccupyICE camp at city hall interrupts traffic.

July 25: City Hall closes its doors to visitors after protesters enter and disturb the peace.

July 25: Spontaneous march in support of Puerto Rico leaves from OccupyICE camp, interrupting traffic.

July 27: City government ends PARS database sharing between PPD and ICE.

July 27: Twenty three Indego bicycles have their tires slashed in solidarity with the prison strike. "Burn all prisons! Fuck gentrifying transport. Fuck the world!"

July 28: Occupy ICE camp migrates from City Hall to Broad St and Arch St.

July 29: Around 300 youth descend on North Broad Street in the area of gentrifying Temple University. Some fighting, trashing of a Wendy's and the hurling of a rock through the window of a cop car was reported. "It was a chaos."

July 31: Occupy ICE camp at Broad and Arch is removed by police. The camp relocated across the street.

August 1: Comcast truck vandalized and has its tires deflated due to Comcast's connection with ICE. "Aspects of the border are all around, and the possibilities for attack on the tools of state terror are endless."

August 4: "End Stop & Frisk" banner dropped over highway downtown.

August 4: Attendees of 'Back the Blue' rally return to find their cars vandalized. Organizer Scott Presler shared that all 4 of his tires were

slashed, in addition to extensive body damage.

August 5: Around \$2000 raised for Anarchist Black Cross Federation Warchest and MOVE 9's legal defense at the Running Down the Walls 5K run, co-sponsored by Philly ABC.

August 6: Philly pig (no offense to actual pigs) shot in the face while serving warrant in Germantown.

August 6: Two successive demonstrations halt traffic to ICE office in Chinatown during morning rush hour.

August 6: Turning Point USA leaders Charlie Kirk and Candace Owens have their brunch interrupted downtown by a shouting mob; Charlie has a drink emptied on his head and is hit by an egg.

August 7: Two police officers were shot in neighboring Camden, NJ, reminding us that the best reason to call the police is to set up an ambush. Ironically, the cops were plainclothes officers in an unmarked car on "National Night Out."

August 9: Police patrol car riddled with bullets in South Philly, alleged shooter murdered by cops.

August 15: Around 2,000 union members rally at Penn's Landing to protest the Trump administration's immigration policies.

August 21: Three banners are hung in solidarity with the prison strike. "Any act of resistance no matter how small, no matter the outcome, is significant. Even the smallest rebellion beats resigning to a life subjugation."

August 21: Noise demonstration takes place at the Juvenile Justice Services Center in West Philly in solidarity with the prison strike. "This energy of this action was bright and joyful and yet felt a bit more militant than other recent actions, with a spontaneous blockade erected and chants such as "Burn the banks, burn the prisons, just make sure the cops are in 'em""

August 25: An anti-fascist anti-police demonstration was attacked by police while protesting a "blue lives matter" march. Bottles were thrown at the Criminal Justice Center during the march. "While it is accurate that our team was unable to effectively attack either the fascist march or the police, and didn't really have the opportunity to try at any point, it is decidedly inaccurate to assert that we did not have confrontational intentions."

Late August: Anti-police and anti-prison graffiti in various neighborhoods.

August 30: "As a contribution to the international week of solidarity with anarchist prisoners and to the nationwide prison strike a banner was hung on Market Street near 46th Street train station."

September 3: Windows of Starbucks at 18th and Spruce smashed and flyer distributed reading, "Starbucks profits from prison slavery. Solidarity with the Prison Strike! (A)" ★

A crackdown on swimming at Devil’s Pool in the Wissahickon River is ramping up again, though the focus this time is less on the danger of jumping into it from high elevations. “There is poop in the water, there are chemicals in the water, and that’s really the long and the short of it,” says Friends of the Wissahickon executive director Maura McCarthy. In fact, more than 90% of the river’s water is treated sewage, as development has limited the amount of water that reaches the ground and an incredibly large human populace in the surrounding areas contribute a lot of waste. This then flows into the Schuylkill and into our taps.

The source of the Wissahickon can be found beneath a shopping mall parking lot in Montgomery County. This is not unlike Mill Creek, which began being paved over in 1869 around 46th St and Market St (The Clark Park “dog bowl” was at one time a pond fed by the creek), or the sinking shopping malls built on wetlands throughout the region. What water remains after the draining and filling of Mill Creek runs through a pipe to the Schuylkill, once celebrated as the largest drain pipe of its time.

In Pennsylvania, the Schuylkill ranked as the third most polluted waterway in the state for cumulative toxic discharges. It also slipped under the wire into the 50 most polluted waterways in the nation, coming in at 49, according to the report released by the environmental advocacy group PennEnvironment. The Schuylkill River and all its tributaries cumulatively rank 26th in the nation for “discharges of all toxic chemicals in 2010.”

The Brandywine and Christina creeks watershed, which stretches into Delaware from Chester County, ranks 37th in the nation for discharges of “reproductive toxicants,” chemicals that disrupt the reproductive system. “Potential health effects of these chemicals are fetal death, cleft-lip and palate and heart abnormalities, as well as neurological, hormonal and immune system problems,” according to the report.

The Schuylkill River is known to have been on fire more than once throughout history. In November 1892, the surface film of oil that had leaked from nearby oil works at Point Breeze, Philadelphia, was ignited by a match tossed carelessly from a boat, with fatal results. This is not a thing of the past, as the Gasland documentary showed that hydrofracking processes contribute to the flammability of water throughout and beyond the state, nor is this isolated or unique to our region since the advent of industrialization.

Development compounds the problem: new expanses of concrete and asphalt increase the amount of stormwater surging into sewers – and the amount of pollution spewing out. Household chemicals, personal hygiene products, pharmaceuticals, pesticides, fertilizers, automotive

chemicals, and trash fill rivers and streams whether from sewage systems or those storm drains. Americanrivers.org suggests: “One hundred years ago, epidemics of these diseases helped limit the life expectancy of a U.S. citizen to about 50 years,” further challenging the Hobbesian myth that pre-civilized life was explicitly nasty, brutish, and shorter than civilized life. Meanwhile, recent flooding contributed obvious amounts of trash to the Schuylkill River in August, as households along the river were flooded by recent storms that are increasingly common due to climate change.

Trees were once able to help keep water out of those sewer systems, but massive deforestation campaigns throughout modern history (that are necessary to the colonization, industrialization and civilization projects that began long ago and persist throughout the world) have limited what little help the trees can give to stem this toxic tide. This is not unlike the record-setting toxic algae bloom known as the “red tide” off the coast of Florida, which continues to persist due to human-induced climate change. Ironically, NPR reports that “having access to even small green spaces can reduce symptoms of depression for people who live near them, especially in low-income neighborhoods” – which in turn is being used by businesses to increase the productivity of their workers, perpetuating a market-based path that is inherently at odds with the natural world. This is a world that we must recognize we are an interdependent part of, or else continue to other and kill off large expanses (or maybe the entirety) of it.

To illustrate that interdependence, take for instance that wolves can affect the composition of rivers, as explained by George Monbiot in his book *Feral*. And not just the water of the river, but whether it physically bends over time or stays straight, which can rely on the impact of large predators on their prey and the plant life that those herbivores eat. Ecosystem health is threatened by an increasingly homogenized world, prioritizing soil-devastating and greenhouse gas-producing agriculture over wild, diverse flora and fauna. That is to say that the natural diversity in this interdependent world we live in is an advantage, and all involved rely on our combined health to thrive.

Activist responses around river health tend toward ineffectual paths like recycling advocacy, anti-littering campaigns, beach and river clean-ups, government regulation of industrial waste or advocacy for “proper” disposal of toxic household wastes – the problem being that even if “properly” disposed of, all these wastes just gather slightly out of sight (and disproportionately on the land base of more marginalized populations), where they continue to seep into the groundwater or get carried away back into the water ways by various means.

Additionally, China recently refused American recycling that they’ve been paid to process, with the seemingly obvious subtext that expending that much (fossil-fueled)

energy to ship the materials would counteract the benefit of recycling it in the first place. A town in Alabama also recently petitioned to reroute a “poop train” that passes through it after New York passed a law that banned the dumping of their excrement in the ocean, which created the need for the train in the first place – yet another example of the civilized exporting their problems from an over-burdened land base to areas inhabited by the more impoverished. Human excrement is among the largest contributors to pollution of waterways worldwide.

But that is the necessity of life under civilization – a word derived from the Latin *civitas*, that is the implicit agreement of “citizens” to the law and order imposed by them as the basis of our coexistence, according to a thorough “Invitation to Desertion” by Bellamy Fitzpatrick in the new green anarchist journal *Backwoods*. It is a way of life, he continues, that created the material city-state and upholds it through increasingly alienating psycho-social constructions, “characterized by the growth and maintenance of cities.” Cities are large, permanent habitations of dense human populations that cannot (due to their size) ebb and flow with local ecological cycles and therefore exists in spite of them – exceeding the carrying capacity of our land base.

We should also remember that the privatization of food surpluses by increasingly sedentary societies at the advent of the agricultural revolution, which created civilization, additionally laid the groundwork for markets (i.e. capitalism).

It’s popularly reported that the absolute minimums civilization could uphold regarding curbing toxic emissions to slow a total ecological collapse are not being implemented by the governments that their citizens look to for leadership, even according to many of the bureaucrats involved. Meanwhile, NASA released video of methane bubbling up from new lakes in the arctic; many estimates of civilization’s collapse predict it to be within less than a century (Paul Ehrlich suggests it is a certainty with decades): “Smartphones are killing the planet fast than anyone expected;” “the world’s largest king penguin colony has collapsed, losing nearly 90 percent of its population;” and people like the Hadza, “the freest people on earth,” face extinction because agriculture is wiping out their hunter-gatherer way of life. Whether or not you believe that humans are actually causing or accelerating climate change, why would you want to live in a place, or in a way, where all the life forms are being wiped out at accelerating rates? Does the prospect of a hyper-sanitized, homogeneous, totalitarian techno-sphere devoid of organic life-forms excite you?

Similarly, one might wonder why any venue that hosts the fracking industry’s “Insight” conference each year, previously in Philly (and this October returning to Pittsburgh), doesn’t burn to the ground with the little Eichmans of ecocide within it. But if the people who recognize the gravity of this situation are not willing to act accordingly, I hope some of them will at least support those that do. ★

[“The Fight Against Borders...” cont. from pg. 1]

surveilled society. As people against borders we can add our efforts to this or not; either way it will go on, with or without us.

In the same vein, policing and control will continue. Cops of all stripes will hunt, harass, capture, lock up, and deport people the state deems disposable. Citizen snitches, legitimacy politics, economic competition, anti-immigrant attitudes, and a number of other social factors do and will continue to add to the enforcement of border control.

We cloud our vision by seeking out a “movement.” By looking for overnight camping and protest marches, we overlook everyday resistance. People are already calling each other when ICE is in the neighborhood, already providing each other with fake papers, already escaping from detention centers, already scheming against exploitative employers, and already surviving despite and against the racist and xenophobic denial of freedom those without legal status face daily.

The causes that made a “movement” against ICE and borders possible are still present. The state may change the facade of the prisons, the media may move onto something else, but those whose lives are affected by borders will push back and evade control. It’s up to us if we want to seek complicity with migrants who defy the borders, if we want to show solidarity with people struggling against the border, its cops, and its snitches, if we want to connect our struggles for freedom with people who delegitimize the borders. Either way, they won’t wait for us to keep fighting. ★

Accident or attack?

In the midst of a nationwide prison strike, Pennsylvania prisons are reporting multiple incidents of prison staff becoming sick because of an unknown substance. The incidents are especially present in the western part of the state. The department of corrections secretary announced the immediate lockdown of all prisons in Pennsylvania until further notice on August 29th. Prisoners’ rights and privileges have been reduced, and staff are increasing their security and vigilance according to the department of corrections announcement.

Maybe the sickness is simply a strange accident, possibly a lie that the state is using to tighten its grip on prisoners, or is the spreading of this illness among prison staff an intentional action taken as part of the prison strike?

In light of the current prison strike, and to add to struggle against ICE and borders, here is an incomplete list of companies involved in and/or profiting from putting people in cages. All of these groups have offices, agents, commodities, or some sort of infrastructure in, or around, Philadelphia. For nearby addresses, phone numbers, or other relevant information on these companies a quick (and secure) online search will suffice. For a detailed list compiled specifically for Philly related to ICE visit phlanticap.noblogs.org/philly-area-ice-contractors-locations-and-phone-numbers/

Amazon
American Airlines
AT&T
Avis
Bank of America
British Petroleum (BP)
Canon
Comcast
Core Civic
Dell

Exxon Mobil
Geo Group
J C Penny
K-Mart
McDonald's
Microsoft
Motorola
Pepsi
Shell
Sprint
Starbucks

Team Sports Planet
Time Warner Cable
United Parcel Service (UPS)
Verizon
Victoria's Secret
Walmart
Wells Fargo
Wendy's
Whole Foods
Xerox

KNOCK DOWN, DRAG OUT FASCISTS IN THE STREETS

A Rhode Island demonstration of far-right activists on August 4th (over in under 30 minutes after being overwhelmed by larger counter-demonstration), a PDX demonstration the same day, Berkeley the following day, DC the following weekend (Unite The Right 2), and the most recent Philly Blue Lives Matter march on August 25th reminds us that grassroots fascists and other far-right advocates are down but not out.

The Portland demonstration was notable in that police nearly killed an antifascist protester by firing a “less lethal” projectile at the back of their head that pierced their helmet and necessitated emergency surgery. If it were not for the helmet, many noted, this would have been an explicitly government-induced repeat of the Charlottesville murder that produced so much mourning last year.

In Berkeley, police arrested and immediately doxxed antifascists on social media.

Meanwhile, Identity Evropa propaganda has shown up in Pittsburgh and New Jersey, and Keystone United (formerly KSS) have been active around Pittsburgh – including catching charges for racially-motivated assaulting of a black man in Avalon, PA. In response, there was later an antifascist community picnic in the same town.

After successive street blockades outside of the Philly

ICE office the very same morning, and the harassment of right-wing organizers at a Center City brunch spot, police appeared to vindictively harass the daily gathering of Occupy ICE activists around Broad and Arch streets, and arrest a community member as they stepped off a curb. Later the same month, when resistance to the Blue Lives Matter march materialized and marched through the same intersection, many were beaten and/or arrested by police.

Though antifascists showing up in the streets correlates with a decrease in attendance to these far-right rallies, this public face on our side increasingly relies on the goodwill of the police and those they protect from visiting harm on us – which they are more than capable, and outspokenly in favor, of doing – and, as we are repeatedly reminded by all sorts of protests against the inherent violence of white supremacy and the police, they often do with impunity.

For these reasons, some are asking if there are more effective methods of winning these battles before fascists even take to the streets, or better ways to assemble outside of the police’s immediate vision to enable moments of lawless accountability. There are already methods being acted on that are easy to proliferate, and they can be gleaned from a rather short-term institutional memory of our more successful encounters, but we should also not forget to come at the institutions that maintain and promote these hierarchies, no matter where they fall on the political spectrum.★

from “Reflections from March Against Blue Lives Matter”

“A lesson to really internalize here is that the police may escalate at any time. If, say, the above opportunities *were* seized, or our team escalated in any other ways, it’s likely that repression faced afterwards would be blamed on those actions. It’s important to keep in mind in the future, when we do go harder and actually crime it up better, that such actions are not to blame for repression.

We’ve seen repeatedly that toning down our actions does not keep us safe.”

[“The Mirage...” cont. from pg. 1]

insights into its tendencies that no mainstream economist is willing to take on — hence professional analysts’ sometimes amazing inability to understand or predict economic trends.

A basic tendency of the capitalist system is that it needs to keep expanding in order for it to preserve itself. At this point in its history, global capitalism has been struggling for some time to find new markets and other ways to continue growing profits at the massive rate that is now necessary. Its growth has happened through increasingly constricting labor costs in a number of ways — through employers decreasing full-time jobs with benefits, automating more jobs, and employing temporary, part-time, or even unpaid labor, as in the notorious case of prison inmates. Some specific manifestations of this have been the rise of the gig economy, which, in promoting “flexible” working arrangements, cuts the costs and responsibilities that corporations would have if they maintained a permanent workforce; the adjunctification of labor in universities, in which professors are hired on a cheaper, temporary basis instead of the university maintaining tenure-track lines; and a major shift towards what’s called just-in-time production, which similarly involves a dramatic increase in temporary work, as employers adjust their workforce based on supply and demand. So the fact that Walmart is posting high earnings does not mean, as mainstream analysts are suggesting, that consumer power is up and the economy will keep doing great. It just means that Walmart is a corporate distributor using just-in-time supply chains to crush labor and reduce costs to the absolute minimum.

Meanwhile, news media is reporting unemployment in the U.S. is at 3.9%; it seems poised to hit 3.7%, the lowest it’s been since 1969. As we’ve written previously, this low number is actually the result of more and more people giving up on looking for work and no longer being

officially counted in the “workforce.” This number has nothing to do with the total population of the U.S. and the significant actual changes in the nature of labor mentioned above. It is hopelessness and misery that are spreading, not the number of jobs.

At what point will global growth actually peak, and another recession kick in? The U.S.’s current economic success is in part the result of the Trump administration’s massive tax cut, spending increases, and aggressive stance on trade, all of which have been calculated to grow the market for now without necessarily holding up well in the long term. Moreover, trade tariffs and the looming reality of Brexit stand to lead to a loss of investment confidence and tank the markets; however, it seems very possible that the escalatory trade threats with China are just Trump politicking and that nothing will actually happen until after the midterm election.

The real sign of a looming recession is wage inflation, meaning the rise in the price of goods that happens when wages increase. It seems obvious, given the reality of employment conditions in this country, that there will not be any significant wage growth any time soon. Average hourly wages have risen only 2.7% in the past year, which is much lower than usual in a strong economy. What the current market’s success really indicates, then, is ongoing success by employers in keeping their workers underpaid and unstable, while pushing more and more people out of the job market altogether. While labor organizing and reforms may occasionally still have some successes, to reverse these trends and go back to better labor conditions under capitalism is structurally impossible for the capitalist system, which depends on increasingly minimizing labor costs. The only way forward for this economy is for the obscenely rich to get richer through devastating the livelihoods of more and more of the world, crushing the ability or will of the latter to do more than survive, let alone rebel.★

THE FALSE IDOL OF SELF-SACRIFICE

Anarchism has often been conflated with social work, much to the chagrin of those of us who prioritize undermining oppression over improving how it functions. That tendency toward charity, thinking it solidarity even when we want very different things politically from those we try to aid, is complicit in the maintenance (or manufacturing) of authority.

For instance, recently a volunteer at a local anarchist space filed a police report after someone came in and damaged the space. The logic behind this was to make medical treatment for the destructive actor available, without pressing charges, which his training as a social worker had taught him to do. But since this person was at the time on parole, this event instead sent him back to prison. Even if this hadn't been the case, filing a report does not take into consideration what the person you're trying to help wants, nor any of the other potential physical or psychological consequences.

Unfortunately, this is what this anarchist was trained to do in a field meant to help people, and in the heat of the moment he understandably reverted to this trained instinct. It had consequences he hadn't intended, but herein lies a risk of formally submitting to this do-the-right-thing (wage-compensated) industry – you're taught to find the path of least harm through state channels. The members of the anarchist space in question have since had meetings and one-on-one conversations about dealing with conflict and reaffirming a shared commitment not to involve the police.

Meanwhile, there is a whole network of activists whose

anarchism is simply to do the social work neglected by the state — a strategy that not only seems to go unquestioned within such circles, but rather is continually applauded as thought it were the most honorable form of struggle. These figurative social workers usually have aims beyond those of the state, but tend only to seek out a new authority to submit to and be punished by. This is notable in how social justice or accountability frameworks often tend to uphold rather than challenge existent social norms. This tendency toward authority, of course, necessitates a larger populace to submit, to struggle, and to sacrifice. This is a leftist tendency — to softly martyr oneself for the cause, clinging to the identities authority has forced upon us as some sort of empowerment, while in reality attempting to build on a narrative of weakness. It involves promoting the most marginalized to leadership positions in order to reverse the current hierarchy, while simultaneously creating a new hierarchy based on the same identitarian logic. No wonder the left is so based on creating a mass movement while constantly failing to produce one. Who would want to join a group advertising weakness, projecting a utopia based in bureaucracy (meetings, consensus, leadership), while also incredibly reliant on the state's social programs?

What would it mean to act instead toward freedom? We could imagine that one might begin by turning all that fiery rhetoric into fiery action. But even that would fall short, as it doesn't ask the question of what it would take to foment insurrection. Caring for others in the struggle, taking our basic necessities (regardless of laws protecting property), and fighting those that stand in our way would be closer to the point. But physically dismantling the infrastructure that intends to prevent us from freedom, in combination with utilizing those expropriated resources for that very cause (by whatever means necessary), is closer.★



7 Theses on the Selfie - National Selfie Day - Summer Solstice, 2018

1. With the advent of facial recognition software, the selfie is a gratuitous embrace of civil society, meaning a society based on law and control.
2. Social media is the selfie, exaggerated.
3. The empowerment incurred from a selfie is offset by the depression resultant from the platform on which it is shared.
4. The selfie is an embrace of the over-importance of the human on earth, and therefore also propagates the misconception that humans are separate from the natural world.
5. The selfie is an attempt to embrace (or stage) a moment while also neglecting to live in it.
6. The participation in advanced technology necessary to taking the selfie furthers technology's advance, the profit margins of those companies involved (even peripherally), and the social controls that are a necessary result of that progress.
7. The concept expressed by aboriginal people that a photograph steals the soul of the subject is relatable to the near-immediate nostalgia as we fawn over the selfie, return to older iterations to compare, and continue with the abstractions and mediations necessary to viewing the picture, as if they are all a part of us.★

A Test of Strength



*The text that follows is the narrative transcript of *Continuing from the Beginning: Lessons from France's Nuit Debout*, a short film documenting the uprisings that occurred in the streets of Paris in spring of 2016.*

“You see, we’ve become a pacified society, an accommodating society, and as a result, we’re in no position to confront the situation we are faced with.

The question is not a question of the diversity of tactics: of who is violent and who is not. The question isn’t of splitting the march, into violent and nonviolent sides. And it’s not a question of a liberal idea of struggle where all its forms sit side by side in a kind of democratic tolerance and so on. The question is how to make a bloc together, and to articulate all its practices in an intelligent, strategic manner.

We should not forget a truth that is becoming more and more obvious to everyone: what counts most for people in the demonstrations is not a confrontation with the forces of order. It’s not an ideological consideration of violence, whether that’s a viscerally anti-violent pacifism or a radical hatred that is obsessed with violence. What counts for most people is overcoming fear — and the risk this implies. This fear is the main thing holding us back, and keeping us from intensifying this movement. This fear can only be overcome in the street.

What’s important for us to understand is that it’s not a matter of morally justifying violence, it’s not a matter of saying “well, it’s a violent world... therefore we have to be violent.” The only question is how — concretely — to enact the gestures that will take us to the next stage, the steps that will enable us to overcome these fears together.

Some people seem to think that a demonstration should be a symbolic ritual — it is “defiant,” it “contests,” and it “airs grievances.” But that’s not what a demonstration is. In fact, it is a test of strength. It’s the place and the moment of physical encounter, in the street, between those people who have reason to revolt, and the police, who are paid to keep this world in the lamentable state that it’s in. On the one side, the people who are ready to risk everything to change the situation, and on the other, those who are paid to make sure that nothing changes. Every demo is the realization of this relation of forces.

There’s a dominant idea of politics as pure talk, pure chatter, which is set apart from all the material apparatuses that set the world to work, grip us, and stabilize forms of power. If it is insurrection that has the capacity to destitute the power that governs us and that is what we aspire to, then two facts follow from this: First, it means we must hold together thought, theoretical elaboration, and practice. And second, we will need a different idea of happiness and joy than the one dominant today. And if we are true to this other idea of happiness, this qualitatively better idea of joy, it will require holding together our thoughts and our acts. Of course, this means that we will find ourselves at odds with those who do not share this idea of happiness — and that implies confrontation.

Every social movement, every revolutionary movement, contains a moment of confrontation. Whether we like it or not, whether we’re pacifists or not. This is the situation we find ourselves in. Once we stop telling ourselves that what we’re doing is illegitimate, we no longer have to picture ourselves from the point of view of a spectator of the struggle, which is always the perspective of the adversary. Legitimacy belongs to those who think through their own gestures, who know what they’re doing and why. This idea of legitimacy is obviously distinct from the state’s idea of majority rule and representation. It doesn’t obey that rationality — it puts forward its own.

If politics is a war between distinct legitimacies, between different ideas of happiness, then our task is to give ourselves the means to carry out this fight, with no limit other than what is just and joyous. We say that wherever we find joy, that’s where our destiny lies. That the ends are immanent. That we must attach ourselves to practices that fill us with joy, and bring us closer to ourselves. That the instant when I am myself is life itself, a full life. What we’ve found in blocking the economy, and routing the police, is the spark of a historical life that nothing can make us renounce, whatever happens.”

Other interesting texts from Nuit Debout can be found in “Reflections on Violence” from a zine called War in the Streets by ill-will-editions and “Dispatches from France” by Paul Z Simons ★